

Angels: God's Secret Agents

Number 1 in a series of messages on the unseen world

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Intro:

When I was growing up, I was fascinated by *movies about secret agents*. It seems like everyone was; *the Bond films* have always been blockbusters. TV shows about spies were popular, like *Mission Impossible*, *Get Smart*, *Man From Uncle*, and *I Spy*. And *recent remakes* have done well. These shows were cool not only because *the suave spy always got the girl* but also because the undercover agents do things normal people can't do and are always in the middle of the action, one step ahead of everyone else. They were commissioned to carry out a vital assignment. *Good morning, Mr. Phelps. This is your mission, should you choose to accept it.*

There's something exciting about the idea of *two opposing forces locked in conflict*. And to think that *both use undercover agents* to further their cause is intriguing. Many people who watch such shows find themselves thinking, *does it really work this way? Does our country have people employed in espionage making use of sophisticated intelligence and powerful weapons?*

To go another step in your thinking, you may wonder if similar forces are at work in *the unseen world*. Do God and Satan employ *undercover agents* to further their agendas in *the ongoing conflict between good and evil*? Do they carry out their work *according to precision timing*, often *unseen behind a cloak of secrecy*? *The Bible's answer is YES! Let's look today at...*

1. The identity of God's secret agents: *Angels are real! They are spirit beings created by God.*

It's amazing to me what a high percentage of people don't find belief in angels to be any big leap of faith. Although our society is almost entirely secularized, many people are fascinated with *spirit beings*. On TV, celebrities talk

about their *spirit guide channelers*. Angel-mania swept over our country in the 90's and the craze hasn't gone away. But is all of what is being said about angels and demons accurate? Is *any* of it true? How can we know?

There are many sources of supposed information about the unseen realm. Where should we turn for information? Should we believe the conflicting claims concerning angelic manifestations? Should we buy into the new age theories? To determine what is real, we need to look past the fad and folklore to the only source of authoritative information on the supernatural, that is the Bible. Anything else we read needs to be evaluated in light of what the Scriptures teach.

If we grasp what the Bible has to say about this topic then we'll be equipped to sort through the alternative voices to determine what is true and false.

The Bible has plenty of material about angels. 17 of the OT books mention them with 108 references. And 17 NT books speak of angels in 165 verses.

Let me tell you where I'll be going in this series. Today's message will survey angels in general. Next week I'll concentrate on a mutiny that took place when one angel, Lucifer, wanted to trade places with God. Then, in message three we will learn about those who followed this imposter in his rebellion. In weeks 3 and 4 I'll teach from the Bible on their influence in humanity and our way to win the battle. This preview of the coming topics reveals the first important thing about angels:

- **They're not all good.** You don't want to *have contact with or be influenced by* any old angel. Like spies in disguise, you don't know who you are dealing with. The Bible refers to angels who are *elect* and other who are *evil*. We'll learn much more about this in the coming weeks.

As for their identity:

- **Angels are spirit beings created by God.** The Bible teaches that all things were made through Jesus (John 1:3).

All things include spirit beings - Col 1:16 - For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. These words describe different classifications of angels. Eph. 6:12 makes this clear - For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Why is it important to emphasize that all angels, even fallen ones, are created beings? Because if angels, including Satan, were eternally co-existent with God, this would mean that good and evil are *equal and opposite*, like ying and yang. The Bible doesn't teach classic dualism. But the truth is that evil is not an equal and opposite force, but a merely a lack of good, as cold is a lack of heat, hate is a lack of love; sorrow is a lack of guacamole.

- **Angels are a higher classification of beings:** Heb 2:9 - the human state is said to be a little lower than the angels. Yet in the future, Christians will judge angels (1 Cor 6:3).

- **Angels come from heaven.** Referred to as heavenly hosts, angels from heaven, etc. They come down to earth from heaven (Matt 28:2) to do God's will.

- **Angels are not mere forces, but persons,** with intellect, emotion, will, and self-determination.

- **Angels do not possess material bodies** but can appear like humans. They take on the form of men, apparently attractive enough that they aroused the passion of men in the town of Sodom who tried to molest them (Gen. 19).

- **Angels often manifest a bright appearance** Luke 24:4 - their clothes gleamed like lightning. Acts 10:30 - Cornelius reported that the angel that appeared to him was shining. 2 Cor 11:14 - Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. Called stars lots of times (Rev 1:20). Was the guiding star of Bethlehem really an angel? They are bright enough: Rev 10:1 - the angel had a face like the sun. Dan 10:6 also.

- **Angels do not marry or reproduce** (Mat 22:30). Apparently they don't diminish in number so there is no need for replacements. They don't die (Luke 20:35,36) and we don't read of them being born or born again. Those who followed God were confirmed in that choice and those who fell were fixed in that state.

- **Angels are powerful, but not all powerful:** 2 Peter 2:11.

- **Angels are wise,** 2 Sam 14:20, **but not omniscient:** 1 Peter 1:12 - they long to look into our salvation. They are learning (Eph 3:10). They don't entirely understand salvation because they don't experience it.

- **Angels are classified in a hierarchy.** Michael is generally mentioned in a military context and is referred to as the archangel, a ruler of others, in Jude 9. He's called the great prince in Dan 12:1. The repeated list, rulers, authorities, and principalities, refers to different ranks. Another term used of angels is Cherubim (Gen 3:24). Lucifer, who became Satan, was in this classification (Ezk 28). They were carved to decorate the arc the covenant. Descriptions of what they look like are pretty wild (see Ezek as well). Seraphim are another classification of angel (Is 6).

2. The purpose of God's secret agents:

Angels glorify God in various roles, accomplishing various functions.

• ***As messengers, angels communicate God's truth.*** Both Heb and Gk mean messenger.

Dan 4:13 - There before me was a messenger, a holy one coming down from heaven. Besides Michael, the angel Gabriel is also mentioned by name in the Scripture. His name means *hero of God*. He often shows up to deliver an important message to someone being used in God's plan. Examples in Dan 8 and 9. See him in action in Luke 1:11-19, 26-37.

Other angels convey encouragement: to Paul: your ship won't go down (Acts 27:22-24). And to Elijah (1 K. 19:3-8).

David Jeremiah: *"They are his messengers: when they give us strength or enlightenment, it is God's strength or enlightenment that they impart. Their encouragement is God's encouragement. Their guidance is God's guidance. When they bring comfort, it is God's comfort they offer. When they bring wrath, it is God's wrath they inflict. What is important is the message angels bring, not the messengers themselves."*

Of course, some angels are not elect and holy but evil and fallen. Satan's demons communicate his lies. Gal 1:8 refers to angel preaching a false gospel.

• ***As worshippers, angels praise God's name.***

Heb 1:6 says all angels are to praise Jesus. Psalm writers frequently call upon them to do so. Ps 103:20,21 Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. In Luke 2:13 we read of angels praising God at the birth of Christ. Is. 6 mentions Seraphim; the word is from a verb meaning to burn, as in burning devotion to God. They are repeating holy, holy, holy, as if they cannot praise God enough. In 6:4 we see

their power - At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. In Rev 4:8,9 we meet winged creatures saying the same thing. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come. They give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever. One more picture: Rev 5:11,12 Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" They know what we don't know because they can see what we can't see. But we can do what they do: praise God.

• ***As ministers, angels carry out God's will.***

They exist to do God's work. Heb 1:14 - angels are ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation. They also minister to the needs of Jesus (*stq mentions references, and remember my notes are on line*).

Angels were used in some notable rescues, like Daniel in the lions' den (6). And the jailbreak in Acts 5:17,18 where an angel was used by God to set the apostles free. This happens again to Peter in Acts 12:1-11. These angels are carrying out God's will of deliverance and this is just what God wants to do in your life.

God also commissions angels to guide, protect and watch over people: Paul urged Tim to carry out his ministry with honor because he's being observed by chosen angels (1 Tim 5:21). They view what's going on (1 Cor 4:9; 11:10). There is not much biblical basis for the existence of guardian angels; the phrase is not found. But in Matt 18:10, Jesus used the term, their angels referring to children. *My kids certainly need some guidance and protection.*

Angels also carry out judgment when it is God's will. There are many instances in the OT. Jesus spoke of this as well in Matt 13:40-42 - As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Angels are active in the apocalypse. Rev is full of references to angels carrying out God's judgments and they don't look like cherubs are usually portrayed.

S - So, they carry out God's will, even when it is severe.

3. The lesson of God's secret agents:

Angels provide an example, focusing our attention on God.

I'll make my point with an analogy. Some people have a tendency to be fascinated by tools. Men are particularly like this. I dig my tool belt. Wearing it makes me feel cool. But then I saw my son the carpenter's tool belt and I thought, *I've got to get more stuff*. It is the same with paraphernalia related to our hobbies. I used to look over my fishing tackle for hours. I've got separate boxes for trout, bass (small mouth and large mouth), salmon, offshore, inshore, surf fishing, kayak fishing, you name it. My fly stuff is also segregated and categorized. I know where I got every lure. I can tell you stories about them. I used to pour over the Cabella's catalogue. At another era in my life, I'd study every page of the Bike Nashbar catalogue for every bike part I thought I needed. But I came to realize that it's not about the bike part, but the pedaling! And it's not the lure, but fishing. And the point is not any tool, but using it to do what its made to do. Angels are God's tools. They don't exist for themselves, but for him, to give him glory.

Angels are never to be objects of worship, for those who worshipped angels are rebuked (Col 2:18; Rev 19:10; 22:9). The means, or tool, should not occupy the spot light.

In the Bible, there are no instances of people asking God to send angels. And the only time we read of someone suggesting this, it is Satan trying to lead Jesus into sin.

The point is that angels are not the point. They do not exist to draw our attention to themselves. They do not do their own will but the will of God. He is in the spot light, in fact, he *is* the light. Angels may shine, but they are only reflectors of his light.

The same can be said of us. They are our examples. But, unlike angels, we have bodies that are always visible. So we are God's not-so-secret agents. As such, we are to communicate God's truth. Praise his name. Carry out his will. You are a messenger. You are a worshipper. You are a minister. *This is your mission, should you choose to accept it.*

Unused thoughts: More Meat:

The angels in Is. 6 provide a lesson for us: We can't ascribe to our high God enough honor! Read of his holiness -in Ex 15:11; 1 Sam 6:20 - "Who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this Holy God?" Ps 99:9 - Exalt the Lord our God and worship... for the Lord our God is holy." Ezek 39:7 - I will no longer let My holy name be profaned, and the nations will know that I the Lord am the Holy One in Israel."

We need a vision of God, not just of His love, but of His holiness. To deliver us from the familiarity which we find so natural.

Note in Is. 6:4 - If angels are powerful, God is much more so! Filled with smoke - Rev 15:8 And the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one could enter... Shaking - Ex. 19:16-19; 20:18-20. How we need the fear of the Lord!

Angels are created beings. Further evidence: compare Ps 148:2 & 5.

Is. 6 they are bright creatures but they still had to hide their eyes from the glory of God. They couldn't endure His brightness.

Archangel is mentioned in 1 The 4:16

More on guarding: Ps 91:11-13?

2 Kings 6:17 - God can let people see them when this is the right thing.

Angels observe us but the real issue is that God sees what we are doing. If God uses angels to watch over us, or meet our needs is secondary.